GUY WEBSTER

It is a stark, surreal tableau without a foothold in time.

Brian Wilson, 33, is seated before a handsome Hammond B-3 organ in the center of the Beach Boys' splendid, 24-track Brother Studio on Fifth Street in Santa Monica, his massive form suspended in the cold blue expanse of a giant circular stained glass window depicting our solar system which looms behind him. The air is electric with tension and Brian's thick-fingered hands are trembling so horribly they can scarcely find their proper places on the keys. Mercifully, the organ is not turned on.

"Come on, Bri," Stan Love cajoles softly. "Play your new song. Play 'California Feeling.'"

The bearded, pot-bellied man at the Hammond smiles weakly, brushes a veil of stringy brown hair from his downcast eyes and sighs with shuddersome exasperation. "Damn," he exhales, in his high, raspy voice. "I'm *so* nervous, but I *will* relax."

I hardly recognize the person before me. He bears no resemblance whatsoever to the lanky, dough-faced teenager who sat atop the bright yellow, palm-festooned pick-up truck on the cover of *Surfin' Safari*, one thin hand clutching a surfboard and the other shielding his eyes from the beach glare as he peered out at the rolling Pacific. Fifteen years and 75 million records later, Brian Wilson, the singer/composer/producer *extraordinaire* who elevated one of the most phenomenally successful vocal and musical groups in history to a permanent place in American folklore, is slumped over a silent keyboard in a soundproof room a half-hour drive from where that first album photo was shot; overweight, overwrought, and scared shitless.

"Come on, Brian," Stan continues. "Play it. It's a *great song*."

Stan Love, sandy-haired former forward with the Baltimore Bullets of the National Basketball Association and the younger brother of Beach Boys lead vocalist Mike Love, is Brian Wilson's first cousin, confidant and salaried chauffeur. He is also his bodyguard. Right now, skinny Stan, elbows on the organtop and eyes riveted on his stout responsibility, is trying his damndest to put his pal at ease.

Since all of this is for my benefit, I decide to pitch in. "What's the song like?" I ask cheerfully, pulling up one of the folding chairs scattered about the neat, spacious room.

"I don't know," Brian murmurs. "It's got a *feeling* to it . . . there's something about it that's very *warm*. It's sort of a Bill Medley-Brian Wilson combination . . ."

"How does the *tune* go?" I prod him gently. "What are the lyrics?"

Suddenly Brian straightens up, rolls his hefty shoulders back and shows a brave, childlike smile. "Heck," he allows. "I should . . . I should just *sing* it!"

He flicks the power switch on the organ, adjusts the volume with the foot pedal and for a split-second I don't want to hear the song. After growing up blissfully absurd to the strains of "Surfin' U.S.A.," and falling in love under the boardwalk with "Wouldn't It Be Nice" resounding overhead. I don't want to see Brian Wilson blow it, any more than I'd want to see Beaver Cleaver get beaten up or Sandra Dee take a dump.

But, as a result of a two-month long series of events too byzantine to recount, this impossible genius and myself find ourselves poised on the brink of what could be one of the bigger bummers of either of our personal lives. Brian's out to tell the world that he's still a *scientist* in the studio and I'm spending a sunny spring afternoon witnessing the first cruel rites. The two of us are shooting this pipeline together, and this time around, I'm praying he *has* that sonata.

Brian's rubbery fingers hover above the Hammond's bared teeth. Fearful, uncertain, they stiffen and he forms two chords, falters, and then begins to sing:

I was walking down the beach in San Onofre,
It was such a beautiful day.
The wind was blowing through my hair,
And the sun dances in the morning sky.
When you're driving through L.A. . . .

Ladies and gentlemen, the beach is *back*.

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Brian Wilson is the Beach Boys. He is the band. We're his fucking messengers. He is all of it. Period. We're nothing. He's everything.

—Dennis Wilson

For over ten years, the eldest son of Murry and Audree Wilson has been popular music's reigning recluse, a living legend swallowed up by the shadows of Southern California with all the myths intact. Before Brian sauntered onto the music scene in the early '60s, Phil Spector had been the undisputed soothsayer of rock 'n roll studiocraft, his awesome "Wall of Sound" appearing impervious. But without so much as a by-your-leave, Bashful Brian rose up to rival the hit-making acumen of Spector and the rest of the LA music mafia with a nonchalantly uncompromising approach of his own: a tabernacle of untutored, unabashedly nasal male voices erupting in seamless Four Freshman-inspired harmonies, underscored by sneak-attack bass lines; layered, muffled percussion and a smattering of Dick Dale/Chuck Berry-flavored lead guitar offset by primitive, unorthodox rhythm chords—all of it sailing on wide-open oceans of monophonic *space*.

Brian (far l.) at 20: "The water really scared me"

And the subject matter: nothing leering or lewd, just an endless summer Saturday of unfettered adolescent Americanism, replete with deuce coupes, Hondas, hamburger stands, radios blasting, spilled Cokes, shut downs, drive-in movies, amusement parks, hop scotch ho-dads and plenty of sun-tanned virginal beach bunnies that dug, *really* dug, *surfers*.

When Brian Wilson retired from public performing early in 1965 following a nervous breakdown suffered on Dec. 23, 1964 while aboard a plane enroute to a concert commitment in Houston, he was at the very height of his powers as a band leader, hit record technician and pop culture mogul. His doctors advised him that continued touring could prove disastrous to both his psyche and perhaps his good left ear, which was being over-taxed by the escalating decibels at live rock 'n' roll shows.

It was a low blow for Brian; the Beach Boys had been his creation, his window to the world. Through them he had been able to break out of his childhood shell, overcome his numbing reticence, and articulate his simple sensibilities.

He loved performing—stepping up to the microphone and singing *his* lyrics, in *his* harmonies, set to *his* music. It was more fun, more satisfaction and more human contact than he had ever dared hope for. As he was later to tell me, "It was the

most amazing thing I could think of."

Now he would have to think of something else. Maybe he could bear losing his mind once in a while, but if he lost his hearing he was a dead man. "I can't fix that damn right ear, no matter what I do!" Brian would tell me in a moment of disconsolation. "It bothers me, but I can't fix it, so I have to accept it."

His concert career terminated, Brian submerged himself in songwriting, arranging and studio experimentation—not to mention hallucinogens—while his band carried on without him. Years passed and rock 'n roll changed, growing harder, heavier, more hedonistic, and then more grave. Lovely B. Wilson-produced Beach Boys records continued to emanate from some orphic source, but these too had changed. Now they were more concerned with *feelings* than *experiences*. The abandon of "Fun, Fun, Fun" and "I Get Around" was replaced by the isolation of "That's Not Me" and the rueful resignation of "I Just Wasn't Made For These Times."

Meanwhile, the bizarre myths surrounding Brian multiplied as the man grew more remote. It was rumored that he had built a sandbox in the dining room of the Beverly Hills home he occupied in the mid-'60s and placed a grand piano in it so that he could continue to draw on the beach for inspiration without ever having to visit it again. His neighbors whispered that he was a hashish head, that he lived on candy bars and milk shakes, that he would record marvelous music and then destroy the tapes, that he had locked himself in his bedroom and stayed there for six straight months—that he was *insane*. They were incredible stories, and most of them were true.

In recent years, a new crop of arcana has grown up around Brian, some of it raising the possibility that his reclusion may not be entirely voluntary. Several in his small coterie of friends outside the Wilson-Love axis grumble that Brian seems extraordinarily dependent on his family for money and mobility.

Brian's freedom of movement is hampered in part by the loss of his driver's license after he was involved in several automobile accidents. "I fucking knocked my head—got a lump on my head—on the last one," he later explained. "That was about three years ago. I haven't had my driver's license since. They took that away from me. Now I just get driven."

Stan Love apparently doesn't take Brian every place he wishes to go; on the precious few occasions he travels unescorted, he reportedly is ill-equipped. Some of his friends tell of infrequent visits by Brian in taxis for which he has to borrow money to pay the fare.

NEAL PRESTON

At 33: a singular charisma and a broken heart (?)

"Brian seems to have a problem getting spending money," says a prominent producer and friend, who told of several private lunches with Wilson in 1975 that ended on a humiliating note. "Brian would ask me if he could borrow $50," he alleged. "I'd always give it to him, but after a few times, I started to wonder why the hell Brian Wilson, who's made millions of dollars in the record business, didn't have any money of his own. I couldn't understand it. He told me he wasn't sure who had control over his money or even the deed to his house."

Equally puzzling are the circumstances surrounding a 1975 production deal that Brian "requested" with Equinox Records Inc., an RCA-based production company headed by Terry Melcher and ex-Beach Boy Bruce Johnston. At the time, Wilson had nothing in the works but *ennui*, and so he signed a contract with Equinox to produce 36 sides over an indefinite period of time. The generous terms included a bonus advance of $23,000 and what Johnston described as "probably the highest production royalty any producer's ever received."

Since then, Brian has worked with Melcher on only four basic tracks, among them versions of "Why Do Fools Fall In Love " and "Money Honey."

The tracks did not turn out as planned—mysteriously, Brian refused to finish them.

"He wouldn't go all the way," says Melcher. "He wouldn't even touch anything in the control booth; he acted like he was afraid to. He'd offer suggestions, but he wouldn't go near the board. He knows his reputation, so he makes a lot of unfinished records; sometimes I feel that he feels that he's peaked and does not want to put his stamp on records so that peers will have a Brian Wilson track to criticize."

Aside from these furtive stirrings, which raised more questions than they answered, Brian has remained an enigma to the handful who have periodic access to him and a phantasmal figure to virtually everyone else.

Every so often, some quick-witted shutterbug would catch a glimpse of Brian Wilson at a private party, or in the backseat of a limousine paused at a stoplight on Mulholland Drive or Sunset Boulevard. Always it was in the dead of night, and the resultant blurred photo would reveal an unkempt, sleepy-eyed manchild bundled up in a terry bathrobe and staring about blankly. As for actually *meeting* Brian Wilson, well, you had a better chance of bumping into Big Foot.

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The Beach Boys released their inaugural single on Dec. 8, 1961 on a small Los Angeles label called Candix. "Surfin'," the 'A' side, and "Luau," the 'B' side, were two of four songs the group had recorded during September on a demo tape produced by Brian. The other two tunes, "Surfin' Safari" and "Surfer Girl," remained in the can while the company waited to see if the group, consisting of Brian, 19, brothers Dennis, 17, and Carl, 15, cousin Mike Love and neighbor Alan Jardine, had a sound worth sinking money into.

Actually, Dennis Wilson was the only member of the Beach Boys who ever adopted surfing as a hobby; Brian, the one promising people that if they could "catch a wave" they'd be "sitting on top of the world," had never surfed in his life—not even after his father Murry insisted he at least *try*, to help the group's image.

"I wouldn't go out," says Brian. "I was scared; scared of the water. It *really* scared me." Instead, Brian drew his descriptive inspiration from Dennis, the "nature boy" of the Wilson clan. "He told me stories and said it was great and I made up songs," Brian confesses.

It didn't take Brian long to get his feet wet in the studio, however. "At first my dad used to help us out in the booth," says Dennis Wilson, "but then Brian took off so fast he left *all* of us in the dust, to where the rest of us, Dad included, would just say, 'Now what, Brian? Now what?'"

Brian Wilson's first solo production was a revised version of "Surfer Girl," a 1963 hit released as a follow-up to "Surfin' U.S.A." It turned up again that September as the title song on the group's third album, an all-Brian production which marked a milestone in the industry; for virtually the first time

In concert without Brian: (clockwise) Carl, Al, Dennis & Mike

PHOTOS BY MARY ALFIERI

in recording history, a major rock group had studio control. Understandably, Brian retains fond memories of the album and the song.

"'Surfer Girl' is my favorite Beach Boys song," he says. "I liked the melody and I liked the music. It was the first ballad we ever did; we actually recorded it before 'Surfin',' 'though we didn't release it 'til much later. We did it without knowing how; it was the first time we ever did a song like that. It was an innocent try —our first innocent recording experience."

After Brian retired from touring, the group released the *Beach Boys Today* (March 1965); *Summer Days (and Summer Nights!)* (June 1965), and *Beach Boys Party* (Nov. 1965) albums before the fateful turning point—*Pet Sounds*.

Pet Sounds was to be Brian Wilson's bid for acceptance as an *artiste*. He had become increasingly obsessed with the notion that the All-American Beach Boys, and those Liverpool interlopers, the Beatles, were locked into some strange, slightly sinister Battle of the Titans being staged on the U.S. record charts. From 1964, on, the two groups' singles see-sawed wildly in the Top Twenty, with the Beatles usually winning out. It was a situation that caused Brian some mild consternation when the British band broke big in the States, but he became downright distressed after his health compelled the retreat into the control room.

At length, he decided that, rather than slug it out single-for-single with the cockney rebels, he would contest them album-for-album with a bold new idea: the *concept*. Brian set to work and for the first time since the Beach Boys signed with Capitol, they did not release a single every three months.

"I was sitting around a table with friends, smoking a joint," Brian recalls, "when we heard *Rubber Soul* for the very first time; and I'm smoking and I'm getting high and the album blew my mind because it was a whole album with all good stuff! It flipped me out so much, I said, 'I'm gonna try that, where a whole album becomes a *gas*.'"

Pet Sounds was to be an analysis of romance, centering on the theme of a young man growing into manhood, falling in love and out again; all the while on a solitary, picaresque quest for the reasons behind his emotional restlessness. Based in part on Brian's life, it is a poignant, sometimes uplifting but ultimately dispiriting work that catalogues a succession of failed relationships. Much of the pessimism and dejection that pervaded the album's 13 selections was reportedly tied to marital problems Brian and his young wife, Marilyn, were experiencing at the time.

Prior to the release of *Pet Sounds*, Brian put out an unprecedented solo single of what was to be the last song on the lp, "Caroline, No." This burst of individualism was a reflection of Brian's growing estrangement from the touring Beach Boys and a mounting dissatisfaction with his lot in life:

Could I ever find in you again,
Things that made me love you so much then?
Could we ever bring them back
Once they have gone?
Oh, Caroline, no.

"My father used to go to pieces when he heard stuff like 'Caroline, No,'" says Dennis Wilson. "See, a lot of people don't know it, but that song was about a girl that Brian was really in love with in high school, named Caroline. He saw her again years later and it all came back to him, and he wrote the song."

Brian's joy with the single's immediate appearance on the charts turned to disgust and depression when the record hovered at No. 32 nationwide and then went into free fall. His grief was redoubled when *Pet Sounds* debuted in May of 1966; although an unqualified critical success, the album sold poorly despite the hit singles, "Sloop John B" and "God Only Knows/ Wouldn't It Be Nice." Thirteen months later, the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper* and Brian's original vision was lost in the stampede.

"I was very proud of that album," Brian says in retrospect. "The reason we made *Pet Sounds* was because we specialized in certain sounds. I don't know how many months we spent working hard on that album to get all those different cuts just right. It was our best—the songs were our pet *sounds*.

"It was kind of a silly thing, but *Pet Sounds* just made me think that you could do a whole album that was a *bitch*; that held together and was not simply a collection of various songs. *Rubber Soul* was a complete statement, damn it, and I

wanted to make a complete statement too!"

Brian Wilson rebounded in October of 1966 with "Good Vibrations," a delightful synthesis of the thematic/stylistic strongpoints of the current psychedelic wave, complete with harmonies to the hilt. While he included enough exotic instruments (sleigh bells, jew's harp, wind chimes, harpsichord, flutes, organ and theremin) to send Phil Spector packing, he sacrificed none of the Beach Boys' prepossessing airiness. It was the variegated but coherent statement he had endeavored to make with the self-conscious *Pet Sounds*. The best part was that he had managed it all in 3½ minutes, and so it became the band's biggest-selling single ever.

Whether by choice or design, Brian Wilson has not made a complete statement since. He knows it, and the Beach Boys can't bear it any longer.

For the first time since he cut "Heroes and Villains" in 1967 for the *Dumb Angel/Smile* debacle, Brian Wilson is back in the studio with the Beach Boys on *his* terms—totally in charge of his material, totally committed to the task of recording a new album; and *composing*.

***

"Well, that's it. That's the song . . ."

Brian shuts off the organ and sits back, relieved but expectant; as he dabs his forehead with his damp shirtsleeve, he keeps sneaking looks at me.

"Do you like . . . I dunno—do you *like* the song?" he finally wonders aloud, his voice loud and squeaky.

I am taken aback by the pathetic urgency of the question; devoid of any pretense to aloofness, it is the entreaty of an adolescent. I feel ridiculous in the role of arbiter of an acknowledged musical genius, and sneak my own look at Brian to make certain I didn't catch him wrong; the total exhaustion in his features is chilling. If a man could wash his face in fear—as if it were some milky, implacable liquid—surely this is the way it would emerge. I am consumed by the sensation that I am talking to a man with a broken heart. For the duration of our meeting, the feeling would never leave me again. But what about the song?

Even in its crude form, "California Feeling" sounds like the best ballad Brian has written since "God Only Knows." My first impulse is to burst forth in gushy exclamations, but instead I try to channel my enthusiasm into succinct sincerity: "I think it's a beautiful song. I think the words are great and the melody is extremely strong. It sounded very good."

There is a brief silence as Brian nods, suppressing a smile. Then he bursts into laughter. "Yeah," he beams. "It's a *good* song."

"What did I *tell* ya, Brian?" Stan chides affectionately before he also breaks up in a hearty chuckle. I feel like I am at a little boy's birthday party.

"Okay, let's do an interview!" says Brian, as if the idea just popped into his head. "Let's *wail*!"

Before I can concoct a question, the floodgates have opened:

"'Palisades Park' and 'Blueberry Hill'!" he explains. "That's what us Beach Boys are working on right now! Everybody's coming in this afternoon and we're gonna do some dubdowns on those! Yep, we're trying to get back together so that we can keep our economy going. See, we don't want to go broke, and what little stuff we have to work with, well, we're trying to utilize that, because . . . well . . ."

Translation: The Beach Boys are back in the studio to sharpen their rough tapes of "Blueberry Hill" and "Palisades Park," two songs that will eventually appear on what Dennis Wilson describes as "one of three albums we're working on simultaneously to fulfill our commitment to Warner Bros. [The group's label since 1970.] It's very possible that one will be an all-oldies album," according to Dennis. "We've wanted to do one for a long time and Brian's into that. The other two could take the form of a double album of all-new material that stretches from hard rock 'n roll to these wordless vocals we've been doing that sound like the Vienna Boys Choir."

The oldies album will also include "In The Still Of The Night," "On Broadway," and "Tallahassee Lassie."

Among the original songs (all titles are tentative) are: "Ding-Dang," "10,000 Years" and "Rainbow" by Dennis; "Gold Rush" by Al Jardine; "Glow, Crescent, Glow," "Lisa" and "Everybody's In Love With You" by Mike Love, and Brian's "California Feeling," "Back Home," "Help Is On The Way" and a tune called "Transcendental Meditation":

When hustle was the name of the game,
I couldn't take the strain.
Then the Maharishi said to meditate,
It's as natural as the rain.

When Dennis Wilson talks about what "everybody" is involved in, he's referring to what he proudly calls "the original, Hawthorne-period Beach Boys." Only Dennis, Mike and Brian are on-hand for today's session; Al Jardine is over in Hollywood at a business meeting and Carl is in traction with a slipped disc. Carl's injury had occurred several days earlier in his Santa Monica home, reportedly while he was lifting a water cooler refill bottle of Sparkletts spring water.

"Carl sings the lead on 'Palisades Park,'" Brian tells me. "He did it on one take. Just as soon as he feels better, I might ask him to add more 'Let's Go Trippin'' guitar to the song, but I'm still thinking about that."

What made you decide to resume an active role in the studio?

"Well, I looked at the guys and they looked kinda sad," he explains, "They didn't look happy; they looked like something was wrong. I said to myself, 'Hey, maybe they're upset because we're not having any hit singles! Maybe they're mad at me!' I checked into it, and sure enough, as soon as we did 'Palisades,' everybody was happy again. Know what I mean?"

rian turns toward me and smiles wanly; it is an embarrassed, painful upturn of his lips that is more the gallant gesture of an excruciatingly shy man than any demonstration of happiness. He is dressed in baggy dungarees, scuffed track shoes and a print shirt with a vaguely orange floral design that has long since been washed out. The limp, faded shirt is unbuttoned in deference to a swollen paunch which, like the rest of Brian, is pale and translucent, like the underside of an albacore.

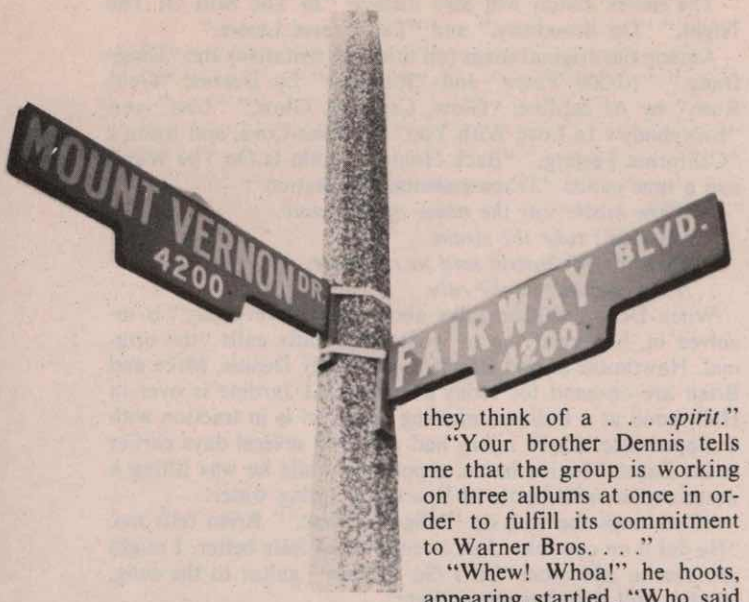
He is not the quietly handsome man he once was; his body is rather disproportionate, the head too small atop his bloated, barrel frame, and the long arms and legs flowing awkwardly from their now-drooped anchor. Yet Brian retains a singular charisma, and when left to himself, there is a dignity in his open heart and insouciant demeanor that is striking.

His round, lightly-whiskered face is placid, practically expressionless most of the time. The action resides in his tiny eyes: One moment they reveal nothing, floating dull and glassy in their pinkish sockets; an instant later they are ablaze with a dark fire, scanning the room from side to side, up and down, in a slow, unsentimental scrutiny, as if gauging the relative worth and importance of everything present, discarding with perfect detachment what isn't useful as a tool or toy.

"Er, whose idea was it to record 'Blueberry' and 'Palisades'?" I stammer, trying to stabilize the unsettling mood.

"Oh, *I* thought of those!" Brian boasts with a vacant grin. "I sat around and thought, 'What would be good?' And it took a little time; because then I thought, 'Oh, the guys are gonna think I'm sloughing off by getting oldies instead of originals.' But now I think they agree.

"If you find the right song, and do that good rendition . . . well, when people think of my music, Beach Boys music,



they think of a . . . *spirit*."

"Your brother Dennis tells me that the group is working on three albums at once in order to fulfill its commitment to Warner Bros. . . ."

"Whew! Whoa!" he hoots, appearing startled. "Who said that? *Dennis* said that? Well, let's . . . *Hell*, the fact is we're behind commitment. And, okay, I'll tell you what happened: We got lax, very lax, slack, whatever, and we let too much time go by and now we're three albums behind." A worried look flashes across his face. "Three albums; that's a lotta albums. We could get sued, I suppose. . . ."

Brian's train of thought is interrupted by the entrance of Earl Mankey, a member of the studio engineering crew; he informs Brian that it's now 3:30 p.m. Brian had scheduled a session for 1 p.m., but didn't arrive until 2:30. Mankey says it's too late to call in the session musicians who were standing by, but says there's plenty of time to dub down the "Blueberry" tape.

"I think we should keep Mike Love's voice as the lead," Brian tells him, "and then, if my brother and Mike want to play, we'll do a track."

Stan, still leaning against the organ, mumbles something about Dennis singing lead on the song.

"What's this about Dennis doing the lead?" Brian demands.

"Oh, that's just what Carl said," Stan says with a shrug. "He thought that Dennis might want to do the lead on 'Blueberry' because he has a raspier voice."

"Beware of hurting Mike," Brian cautions. "*Really*, Stanley." Brian bursts into nervous laughter. "Boy, what is this I'm facing? The Wilsons *and* the Loves? I'm outvoted?"

"Nah," Stan says sheepishly. "You're right, Mike should stay."

Mankey moves to go, somewhat confused. Brian tells him to start playing the "Blueberry" tape and he'll be in shortly. Minutes later, the control booth is bursting with a lonesome slapback bass being goaded forward by the ghostly plip-plop of what sounds like a timbale stuck under on a dripping faucet, as Mike Love's breathless intro creeps into the foreground:

I found my thrill,
On Blueberry Hill,
On Blueberry Hill,
When I found you.
The moon stood still—

On "still," Love is joined by the rest of the group in a thunderous harmony refrain as a host of horns, guitars, drums and organ cut loose. The feel is muddy and unpolished, but the track possesses the same infectious energy that turned their original failure with "Barbara Ann" into a successful 1966 single when they redid a "live" version on *Beach Boys Party*.

Brian jumps up when he hears the music and begins walking around the studio, snapping his fingers idly and acting as if he's looking for something. He peers behind the grand piano in the corner and then squints up at the ceiling.

"Hey!" Stan calls out. "Come on back here!"

"Oh," says Brian, caught in a catnap of concentration. "Excuse me."

He dutifully returns to the organ bench, but remains distracted. I recapture his attention by asking if he's pleased with the way his two oldies are turning out.

"Hey, they sound *really* tight," he bubbles. "I like 'em both and I think they're both hits. 'Palisades Park' has an edge, though, because it's upbeat. We changed the original arrangements around quite a bit to fit our style. On 'Palisades,' we really sort of did a stock background. It wasn't a spectacular production; we did everything in one take. We wanted it to be kind of mediocre with a good beat and a simple vocal to reach people that way, because we have a little problem."

A little problem?

"Yeah. See, we used to be real *arty*, you know? And at times it only sold to a select few, but if we could just get *commercial*, I believe we could sell records; I believe it could be done. So if we could get that together, I think we could really sell—and be back in the action!"

Back in action? The Beach Boys recently tipped the scales for million-plus sales of *Endless Summer* and *Spirit of America*, two Capitol anthologies of early favorites, and they continue to be one of the most successful concert attractions in the world. Brian, however, seems mortified by these developments. In his eyes, the Beach Boys are an aimless studio band that stays on the road cranking out his aging triumphs to avoid facing up to their creative debilitation; what was once Brian's forte is now the group's greatest pitfall: hit singles.

Brian pauses, and looks away, as if reevaluating this path of thought. When he turns back, he is frowning.

"We've been off the singles chart for *eight years*," he says, "and that's a long time not to be having any hits and stuff. So we would be really pleased if we could get something that the mass will like.

"I personally have been *long* forgotten from the writing," he states morosely. "Everybody's saying, 'You're a great writer, a real genius.' But it's been a long time and it will be a shock to re-enter. I mean, I'm going through shock myself right now."

He rifles through the pockets of his jeans and extracts a battered pack of cigarettes, lighting one hastily. He is about to resume his melancholy soliloquy when a tanned, athletic, surfer-type in overalls, sweatshirt and sneakers strolls into the studio. Dennis Wilson, his moppish hair happily disheveled, and sporting a two-day beard, flashes his good-natured grin around freely—until he spies Brian's cigarette.

Dennis *(irritated)*: "What are you doing *smoking*, Brian? Huh? Listen to your voice! You're starting to get hoarse! *Jes-sus!* Don't be stupid! Put out that cigarette *now*! Take two puffs and put it OUT!"

Brian *(indignant)*: No! I'll finish it and then I'll stop. I have no more cigarettes."

Dennis *(to Stan)*: "Man, what *is this*? I thought you were gonna help him stop that damned smoking!"

Stan: "Hey! What can *I* do?"

Dennis: "Take the cigarette out of his *hand* and put it in the ashtray! There's too much damn smoke around here as it is! *(To Brian)* Put it out!"

Brian *(holding up the cigarette)*: "When this thing reaches the butt to the filter. . . ."

Dennis: "Brian! Two puffs and then put it out!"

Brian *(voice cracking)*: "What are you *talking* about? *I'm smoking my cigarette!*"

Dennis: "How many have you smoked today?"

Brian: "Four."

Dennis: "Honest to God?"

Brian *(smirking)*: "Four packs. . . ."

Dennis *(stalking off)*: *"Jes-sus!"*

Brian returns to the organ bench to continue our talk.

"What year is this?" he asks Stan.

"1976," Stan answers blankly.

"Okay," rules Brian, "so finally it's 1976 and we're still riding on our past success. I mean, I've gone on *that* for I don't know *how* long!"

"*Too* long," Stan offers. "How's that?"

"Really," says Brian with a crooked smile. "Like, okay, we'll get a song and we'll go halfway and we won't follow through. Fine. I kick myself in the ass for it and then *I* come back and try again. It's almost like a guy that gets knocked down: he has to keep getting back up until he gets himself together; that's how it works. All I care about is that I want everyone to be happy. If these sessions aren't any fun, then fuck it! It hasn't been for a while, and that's why we said, 'Fuck it!' for a few years.

"In the last two years all I ever cut, all I *ever* recorded, was skimpy little bits and pieces; little fragments," he confesses. "Something happened to my concentration—I don't exactly know what, but it weakened for some reason—and I lost the ability to concentrate enough to follow through. But that's my own problem; because of hang-ups I have.

"There's something called instinct, okay? And if your instincts start to lead you, then fuck, that's *where it's at*. And if they lead you astray. . . ." He doesn't complete the sentence.

"But you have to get a feel for *instinct* versus *opinion*," he asserts. "If you say, 'Palisades Park' and get that *feeling*—then it's straight ahead! If you don't, and start thinking too hard, well, that's what makes me retreat.

"I get too mental," he admits sadly, "and I don't think I follow my instincts as much as I should. I used to—shit, for years in a row! I mean *instinct*, I used to think them hits up one after another." He snaps his fingers rapidly. "Then I got too *thoughtful* about it and fucked up. So I suppose I have to get back on my fucking feet and trust my instincts and go with them a little.

"There's a lotta different ways to go," he tells me. "One way is very *mental*, trusting in your mind; the second is kinda going with your *instincts*, and the third would be *force*. If the first two fail, the last sets in—but that can work too.

"A lotta people use plain, sheer force to get where they want to go. Others say, 'Hey, man, this is the direction!' And they ride it. Hell, I've seen a lot of force, where you force something on somebody for their own good. You just say, 'Oh, goddamn, I *know* this is right for you!' and you can be right . . . sometimes.

"What we have to do," he decides, "is find the best ten songs we can and do an oldies but goodies thing. We could do 'Sea Cruise,' and I'd like to do 'Ruby Baby,' because I think Dennis could do the lead on that really good. We could do 'Working In a Coal Mine' too."

He sings a few bars:

Working in a coal mine!
Going down, down!

"See," Brian counsels, "The trap is, there's an awful lot of commerciality that we're exposed to, and that's intimidating. Even if the stuff isn't really art, there's something about a commercial record . . . that *special* something. We released a few good records and they bombed in the face of more commercial stuff. 'Sail On Sailor' was very arty, but it was a damn good record and it bombed. When that happens, it's a little defeating. [Actually, it was their best-selling single since signing with Warner Bros.]

"We were ahead of people in some ways during our early Warners period," Brian concedes, "but we were not commercial. I don't know if there's a real problem or not about this commercial idea; but what bugs me is to go into a studio and if I still have a defeatist mind, I say, 'Aw, it's good, but it's not gonna sell.'

"If I'm sold on the fact that we aren't gonna sell commercially, then I don't know. Maybe I've made my mind up that we're *not* gonna sell, so now I go into the studio and do it for the sheer fun of it.

"Eight years with *no* hits," he sulks. "Eight years without something the kids'll buy on *instinct*. Ahh, but look at Sinatra. Thirty-five years in this business and he can't get a hit single! Phew! Who knows what the fuck people are thinking?"

In an effort to lift his own spirits, Brian points out that "even during the Beach Boys' bad times, other people imitated us," but declines to mention any names. "I'm convinced that our thing is *very* imitatable," he says. "It's very *easy* to imitate us, so in that respect, the Beach Boys are still happening. But there's a funny thing called 'Doing your own thing.' If you're not actually projecting something of your own, it's too easy to fall down that elevator shaft, and get *panicky*.

"That's why I say it's better now to having a winning attitude. I didn't always but, by God, it works! You've got to at least think you're a winner, even if it hurts to say it!

"But since we got back from Holland we haven't recorded diddily-womp, and I don't know what the fuck for. I don't know why."

STAN LOVE

Genius at work: "What now, Brian? What now?"

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As far as Warner Brothers Records is concerned, the Beach Boys have been a big commercial disappointment over the last five years, and the company thinks it knows why: not enough of the Brian Wilson touch. Only time will tell whether Brian's new Norman Vincent Peale pathology will translate into hit records, but in the meantime, all the bosses in Burbank want to know is: "Where's the product?"

Alas, the Beach Boys have had that question mark hanging over their heads so long, what once was a Sword of Damocles is beginning to resemble a halo. As Dennis Wilson puts it: "I was talking to Brian the other day about the fact that the band hasn't released a new record in a long whlie and he said, 'Well, good things take time.'"

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"The best-selling Beach Boys album on Warner Brothers? That's a tough one. If you considered the *Beach Boys In Concert* album as more than a single record, well, obviously *In Concert* is the only Beach Boy album that went gold. It did not go gold because it sold enough copies to push a single-record package into the realm of a gold record, however. But because it was a double-record set and because it had a greater retail price, it went gold if you pro-rate the sales via the price and you call one of those albums 1¾ albums or 1½ albums or whatever . . . and that was the biggest-selling album."

SUZANNE MURPHY

GUY WEBSTER

"I always loved the Beach Boys image"

What Dave Berson, the Executive Assistant to the Chairman of Warner Bros. Records, is trying to tell us is that the Beach Boys have managed *only one* gold record on his label—and it was a struggle. While Capitol racks up platinum awards for Beach Boys records over five years after the group left the company, Warner's catalogue seems lost at sea. To add insult to undertow, Warner-Reprise has not done as well as it hoped with the four post-*Pet Sounds* lps the Beach Boys purchased from Capitol in 1972 and repackaged on Brother/Reprise as two-record sets: *Wild Honey/20-20* and *Smiley Smile/Friends*.

"The initial album, *Sunflower*, which might be the best album the Beach Boys ever recorded, did not sell many copies," says Dave Berson, "and we were very, very disappointed. *Surf's Up* was a very, very big album for us, to a large extent, I think, because Brian Wilson was still involved, but it did not go gold. The next album, the double-record set of *Carl and the Passions' So Tough/Pet Sounds*, was our worst-selling Beach Boys album."

Chronologically, that leaves *Holland* and *In Concert*. The latter was originally submitted to Warners as a single record, was rejected, resubmitted as a double album, and nearly got rejected a second time. *Holland* also was rejected once, but that's a story in itself. . . .

> **Concentrating on their widely recognized obsession—technological advance—they took off for Holland where the surf's NEVER up and went through some half a million dollars settling in and arranging for nearly four tons of flying studio, a prototype for the future, to be brought from America. The evidence of the whole incredible adventure is on their new album, simply called *Holland*.**
>
> **—from a Warner Bros. press kit November, 1972**

"It was Jack Rieley's idea to go to Holland," says Brian Wilson. "We met him one night when he walked into our health food store. [Brian was part-owner for a time, of a health food store in West Hollywood called the Radiant Radish. The store closed July 29, 1970, after being in operation for approximately one year.] He walked in and said, 'Hi, I'm Jack Rieley from NBC News.' And I said, 'Hi.'

"He said, 'I've got a show over at KPFK, come on over and do an interview.' So we took a liking to the guy and he joined us as a manager and a singer and songwriter; a really stimulating person. He had a deep voice.

"So after a while, we were tired of California and Jack Rieley said, 'Let's go to Holland and do some concerts!' So the band went over and stayed and did an album."

The "concert" the Beach Boys scheduled was an appearance on a Dutch TV spectacular called *Grand Gala du Disc*. After the show, the band and their families stayed on, deciding to make Amsterdam the base of operations for their European tour, and then spent several months in The Netherlands' countryside recording their fourth Warner Bros. lp. When the tour ended, they set up shop in a converted barn in rural Baambrugge and sent for Brian.

Wilson's wife and two daughters, Carnie and Wendy, made it over all right, but Brian himself was another matter. Twice he set out for Los Angeles International Airport to catch flights, but both times he decided for some unknown reason to turn back.

On the third try, Brian appeared to board the plane, but when it landed in Amsterdam there was no sign of him, save his passport and a ticket made out in his name which were found on his empty seat. After an hours-long search, he was located in the Dutch airport's duty-free lounge—sound asleep on a couch.

Brian's last three Beach Boys offerings [excepting his "Child of Winter" 1974 Christmas single] were all on *Holland* "Funky Pretty," "Mount Vernon and Fairway," a 12-minute fairytale set to music that Brian wrote while in The Netherlands, and "Sail On Sailor," which was written and recorded in Los Angeles.

Mike Love, golden-haired but irrevocably balding, and dressed in sandals, white chinos and a long woolen jacket woven in a colorful Indian design, is perched on a stool in a corner of the Brother studio, watching through a great glass window as Brian mixes "Blueberry Hill" in the spaceship-like control room. Earl Mankey, trying to be encouraging, keeps asking Bri what he thinks about "more saxophones? More echo? More bass drum? More . . .?"

Brian, stonefaced and bent over the board, is completely oblivious, sliding his fingers up and down the rows of dials, twisting this, turning that, engrossed in his favorite gambol.

"Ah *yes*," Love whispers to himself, immensely pleased by the total picture. "It's just like old times. I can remember that around 1957-'58 I guess it was, Brian had an old Rambler, and he used to come over my house a lot to hang out and sing. I was living at the corner of Mt. Vernon and Fairway in the View Park/Baldwin Hills section of Los Angeles at the time.

"You know that line in Brian's fairytale about 'distant lights'? Well, that was from my bedroom upstairs, which had a fantastic view. We had knotty pine bunkbeds built into the wall and we had a sunporch outside where we could sit out and look all over the city. We used to sleep in the bunks and I'd have a transistor radio on under the covers so we could listen to the late-night R&B on KGFJ and KDAY. You remember that part in the fairytale about the prince's 'magic transistor rado'? Well, that came from *that*.

"Brian thought up the idea of the fairytale in Holland and we all thought it was *great* how the whole thing came together. We all loved working on it, and from the start we thought it made a great little 'present' to go with *Holland*; so that's what we did. Don't you *love* it? Isn't it *wonderful*?"

About 45 minutes later, I chatted with Brian about the fairytale and he gave me *his* version of the record's development.

"The fairytale? Okay, lemme tell you. Well, we were in another country; we were in Holland, and I just sat around and drank apple sap—that's like apple cider—and just sat around and dreamed. And one night I was listening to that Randy Newman album called *Sail Away*. So I started playing the album and I was sitting there with a pencil and I started writing. And I found that if I kept playing the Randy Newman album, I could still stay in that mood. It was the weirdest thing; I wrote the whole fairytale while listening to that album. It was the weirdest little mood I created.

"I was thinking about Mike Love's house, and I just wrote, 'There was a mansion on a hill,' and then later on, in my head, I created a fairytale.

"But anyhow, so I had the fairytale, but *nobody* was ready for that. *Nobody*. I remember, Carl said, 'WHAT?!'

"Then . . . Oh, I know what happened! I got *fucked up*; I got *depressed*. So Carl did all the editing on it and even did part of it himself when I wasn't there. It was really a thrill; the first time we'd ever done anything that creative. I wanted it to be on the album, but they [the group] said, 'No! It's too long.' We argued and all, and I was depressed. So they finally compromised by saying, 'Okay, we'll slip it in that package as an extra record or something'. . . ."

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Warner Bros. was not pleased with the original version of *Holland* and rejected it, soon after it was submitted, as a "weak" album. The Beach Boys—who had dropped a personal fortune on the escapade—"freaked," in the words of one Warner Bros. employee, who added. "It was bloodshed; everybody went wild." It seems that the company had been waiting for something easily marketable to offset the *So Tough* fiasco and was unmoved by the fairytale and impressionistic cuts like Jardine and Love's 10-minute 'California Saga'—not to mention the absence of a strong single.

From here, the sequence of events takes a somewhat gothic turn.

With *Holland* in limbo and tempers flaring, a business associate close to the problem decided to contact several people near Brian Wilson in the hope that Brian either *had*, or could be induced to *compose*, a surefire single suitable for inclusion on the album. Among those contacted was Van Dyke Parks, a Warner Bros. artist who had co-authored "Cabinessence," "Heroes and Villains," "Vegetables," and other material with Brian during the *Smile* period. Parks is said to have shown up in the executive offices of Warner Bros. Records "minutes" after he was telephoned, carrying a cassette of a song called "Sail On Sailor."

The following description of what was on Parks' cassette was supplied by an extremely reliable source close to the Beach Boys (the source, who was present when the cassette was first played, requested anonymity):

"Brian [was] playing that song ["Sail On Sailor"] on the piano. It was completely different words. He's singing different words; much better words. It was one of the most curious things I've ever heard.

"It begins with Van Dyke saying, 'Brian, there's something you gotta do for me, man. I want you to sit down at the piano and I want you to write a song for me. Lyrics, melody, everything. I want you to do it right on the spot.' Brian says, 'I'd do anything for you, man, but would you do something for me?'

"Van Dyke says, 'I'd do anything for *you*, Brian.' So Brian says, 'Hey, you gotta convince me, Van Dyke, that I'm not insane.' He keeps repeating, over and over again, 'Hypnotize me into thinking that I'm not insane. Convince me that I'm not insane.'

"Van Dyke says, 'Cut the shit, Brian. I want you to write this tune right here.' And the cassette goes on for about 15 minutes. As you can imagine, there's a lot of halts in it. He's trying to do the words at the same time, too. So when he runs out of words, he stops playing and starts again."

At Warner Bros. insistence, the Beach Boys recorded what proved to be a re-written version of "Sail On Sailor," with Blondie Chaplin singing the lead. Brian reportedly had no hand in the production of the song.

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To understand Brian Wilson, it helps to get a handle on his brother Dennis. While Brian and the others were indoors writing and singing about the surfing lifestyle, Dennis was down at Manhattan Beach *living* it.

"I don't know why everybody doesn't live at the beach, on the ocean," says Dennis with a bemused shake of his head. "It makes no sense to me, hanging around the dirty, ugly-as-shit city. That's why I always loved and was proud to be a Beach Boy; I always loved the image. On the beach, you can live in bliss. You wake up and fall out into that water, go fishing, go sailing, go. . . ."

The rest is drowned out by a noisy flock of gulls that dip and soar in the cloudless blue sky above us. Dennis and I are spending a gusty spring day in Santa Monica Harbor, polishing the fittings on *Harmony*, a magnificent 62-foot sailboat that he rebuilt from scratch last year with "a couple of Yugoslavian guys.

"Lookit this," he orders, taking time out from rubbing a shine into one of the handrails to lick his calloused thumb and rub it against the weathered deck. "See how the grain comes out in this wood when it's wet? This is *teak*; it's made to look beautiful when it's all wet out at sea. This boat looks okay now, but it looks best when it's in action."

The boat has a lot in common with Brian Wilson.

"It took a while for Brian to get himself shipshape again, and he could still stand to lose a few pounds of gut. But I think I understand why he took off for a few years," says Dennis. "He wanted to rest and felt there was no sense living in the past. He's been through a lot of tremendous emotional changes and setbacks from taking drugs and not understanding them, among other things. Brian's a reclusive, sensitive, vulnerable guy and he was probably one of the most famous people in the world at one point. That *completely* got to him.

"But the thing I wonder about is where does Brian's creative spark come from? Not his subjects or anything, but his spark. What makes it so great for me is that I really don't know. There's a mystery behind Brian, even to *me*. Creatively, where in the fuck does the guy go? Where is he coming from?"

Dennis tosses his polishing rag into the hold and goes down into the galley, emerging moments later with a frozen cream pie that he proceeds to shovel into his mouth with a small fork.

"Brian is more reclusive now than he was 7-8 years ago," Dennis confides with a swallow and a wink. "Back in Hawthorne he had a tremendous sense of humor. He was a prankster. He used to pull the most outrageous stunts with my family!"

Like what?

"Like. . . ." He pauses to reflect and begins laughing up-

roariously. "Nah, I'm not gonna tell you *that* one, but, like—like driving down the street going to school when we were kids," he snorts gleefully. "We'd be rushing to school and Brian would be drinking a carton of milk, and he'd stop and open the door and pretend he was throwing up by emptying out the whole milk carton! Or he'd stop and wait for a hitch-hiker to run up to the car and then he'd take off! Or shitting on a plate and putting it in front of my dad at *dinner*!!" Dennis nearly chokes on a hunk of pie.

"Jes-sus! He'd totally let go, and whatever could happen he'd let happen. The group started that way, setting up a stage in the garage to have funny performances. He was out front, almost in an embarrassing way. He'd be somewhere and say, 'Oh, God, I'm gonna *fart*.'"

Dennis chuckles on for a few minutes and then calls for sobriety.

"Let me say something serious," he begs. "People always thought Brian was a goodtime guy until he started releasing those heavy, searching songs on *Pet Sounds* 'n all, but that stuff was closer to his own personality and perceptions. By the time people get close to an accurate picture of Brian Wilson—if ever—he's gonna be far beyond them again, and I can dig his frustration.

"For instance; I wrote a song intended for *Holland* about Vietnam," he says. "I got the image of a soldier—me—dying in a ditch, and I ended up doing a song about it. The soldier began feeling, 'Why the hell am I here?' Then the coldness started to move up his body from his feet, to his legs, to his chest . . . until he was dead. See? It was too *negative*! How could I put that on a Beach Boys album?"

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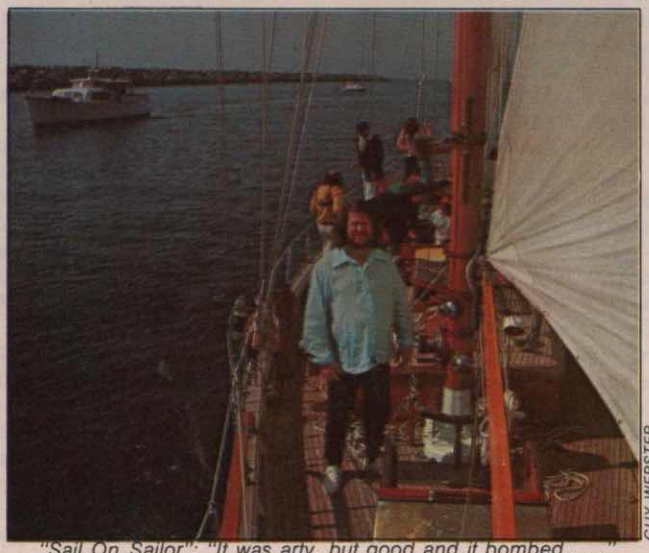
"The great thing is, at least *I* feel, that you can put *anything* on a Beach Boys record if you can get that *feeling*," says Brian Wilson. "I think our fans will like oldies as much as anything if we give it the classic Beach Boys touch, and I have faith in 'Blueberry Hill' and 'Palisades Park,'" he concludes, sealing the pact by downing his third consecutive glass of fruit juice.

"Boy, this stuff is good for you!" he assures as he places his glass on the counter in the Brother Studio kitchenette. "I'm trying to get everybody, Carl and Dennis and all these guys, to start taking vitamins and eating healthy foods, like I've been doing . . . lately. I'm writing a song called 'Help Is On The Way' about how people should forget about hotdogs and hamburgers and eat good food.

"I like sweet stuff, though," he admits. "When I used to hang out at Foster's Freeze, I'd get a 'Sludge' everyday; a cherry Sludge with ground-up ice. Good drink."



GUY WEBSTER

"Sail On Sailor": "It was arty, but good and it bombed . . ."

With a half-day's studio work under their belts, Dennis, Mike (and Stan) decide to take a short break, ambling into the cozy, plant-filled lounge in the front section of the "Brother Building." They are lying about on the stylish '40s beach furniture shooting the breeze when a refreshed and smiling Brian enters and sits down on the couch.

Stan: "Brian! Hey, how ya feeling buddy?"

Brian: "Okay."

Dennis: "Hey Brian. I was just telling Mike and Stan that I saw a musical in New York the other day called *The Wiz*. It's a black Wizard of Oz; the whole cast is black and the score is all soul music, man! Brian, you should go to New York for a few days sometime soon and see *The Wiz*. Hands down, it's the best musical I've seen."

Stan *(excited)*: "Brian, let's go to New York in a week or two and see the play!"

Brian *(uneasy)*: "Are you kidding! New York—that's a *lonely* place, with all those tall, dark, unfriendly buildings."

Stan: "Well, why don't you take your lonely friends with you?"

Brian: "No deal."

Dennis *(diplomatic)*: "Well, New York *can* get a little weird. When I was there last week I did a few interviews . . ."

Brian *(softly)*: "Someone should interview my psychiatrist."

Dennis: "What was that, Brian?"

Brian: "I saw a doctor today. Somebody should talk to *him*. You know what he told me? He said, 'Okay, we're gonna start on *self-nourishment*.' I didn't know what that was. He said, 'Read this little piece of paper.' He handed me the piece of paper and said, 'Read it to me.'

"It said, 'I love you.' Turns out you're supposed to read this to yourself.

"The doctor said that you're supposed to tell yourself you love yourself and you trust yourself. It's a whole, weird thing. You're supposed to read the paper three times a day for five minutes each time, no matter *where* you are, saying, 'I love you, I love you' to yourself, and all these other different thoughts; they're all written on little pieces of paper. It's supposed to be called nourishment; it's supposed to help you. It's a really weird idea.

"Heck, I lost the paper. I thought the guy was *crazy*."

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The following morning, Brian, dressed in the same shirt he wore yesterday, the same scuffed track shoes and a pair of navy blue pants with wiggly white lines running down the outside of either leg, is jogging along a portion of UCLA's cross-country course.

Stan Love, trim and confident in a lemon-colored warm-up suit, is urging him on:

"That's it Bri . . . there's no hurry . . . enjoy yourself."

It's the first day of Brian's Stan-inspired physical fitness program and as he takes the hill, shirt-tails flapping, he does seem to be having a good time.

After the brisk run , Brian, Stan and I locate a shady spot under some pines, where my two companions hold each other's ankles while they do some sit-ups.

Brian . . . does . . . 10!

Stan . . . does . . . 11!

"You know, I dig running," Brian tells Stan as we walk back to the Mercedes. "Were you surprised I could go that far?"

"I was *very* surprised when we were coming back up that hill," Stan replies, "because coming up the hill is a lot tougher."

"Yeah!" says Brian. "Now, let's go home and get some orange juice."As we are getting into the Mercedes, Brian turns to me and asks, "Have you ever been to my house before?"

No, I tell him. Never.

"Well, I live where I've lived for the last eight years," he says. "I live in a big house with a big wall around it. . . ." ■

NEXT MONTH, PART 2: BRIAN WILSON, PRISONER OF BEL AIR? Life in a Spanish mansion with Marilyn, the kids (and Stan) and the iron gate at the entrance. Plus the truth about *Dumb Angel/Smile*: "It was destroying me!"

photograph by Guy Webster

The Boys in control: "emotional responses."

BEACH MEN: WE CAN GO OUR OWN WAY

by Timothy White

When Brian Wilson ended his long seclusion last year and began to come to grips with being what his psychiatrist had diagnosed as "a very frightened man," I braced myself for the Beach Boys' impending Brian-produced lp. The oldies - obsessed *15 Big Ones* was the letdown I'd anticipated; not simply because its architect was coming off an extended period of inactivity but also, as it later became known, because the album was "pushed out" to capitalize on a much-ballyhooed tour. At the time, I called the record a "shoddy product" and remain firm in that judgment, now finding it almost unlistenable.

Thankfully, its sequel is an original, cogent and vital album, although no less perplexing than its predecessor when compared with the Beach Boys' earlier efforts. The Boys' compositions have never been known for their thematic tenacity, the group usually restricting its muse to the rigors of the young, white suburban ethos. But the hallmark of their formidable heyday was a striking technical polish. *15 Big Ones* and *The Beach Boys Love You* are so delinquent in this respect it appears they have decided—in deference to Brian—to adopt an artistic holding pattern whose tenor parallels that of their initial '60s releases. *Love You* possesses an unignorably *nervous* quality, its production values and arrangements burdened with an amnesia - like veneer of B. B. bromides.

Love You, however, is not the hasty warm-up exercise *15 Big Ones* proved to be, but a virtual Brian Wilson solo album which unknowingly betrays as much about its author's current emotional state as did *Pet Sounds* in 1966.

As with the work of an artist like Dory Previn, it's wrong to separate so eccentrically urgent an lp from its troubled source. With the exception of Spring's "Good Time," "Let Us Go on this Way" and the doggerel "Ding Dang" (which Dennis Wilson previously described as a "working title" for one of his own songs), the material is solely Brian's. And although he turns his guileless attention to such childlike topics as the solar system, airplanes and Johnny Carson, the music miraculously transcends its Crayola conventions and forms an extremely affecting portrait of a man trying to redefine his shattered personality.

"I'm a very neurotic person; neurotic and nervous and uptight all the time," Wilson explains. "I can't help it. There's nothing I can do about it and I don't know why. Meditation don't help me. It doesn't help me like the Maharishi [or Brian, in "The TM Song"] said it would—it just doesn't do shit for me. I've given up on it."

Brian likewise had to give up, at the end of 1976, on his much-publicized psychiatrist, Dr. Eugene Landy.

"He withdrew from the case," says Brian. "He had some difficulty with my business manager. Now, I'm seeing someone else. Doctor Steve Schwartz. In my program with [Dr. Landy] I was being monitored every 20 minutes by him. [He had] control of my life legally through the commitment of my wife—my wife committed me to him—'cause I had gotten very low with drugs and got myself in a bad position mentally, physically and emotionally. He definitely helped me. It cost over a hundred thousand dollars—he charged a hell of a lot per month."

Did Brian ever feel that Landy had too much control over him?

"I thought so," he says, "but there was nothing I could do about it and I eventually gave in to it."

The 34-year-old Beach Boy indicates that in retrospect he was not entirely pleased with his former doctor's controversial decision to book him for a solo guest shot last November on NBC-TV's *Saturday Night* show.

"I was a little put out by that," he reveals. "I'm not generally used to being alone; I haven't gotten used to that and it's difficult for me. I have a *lot* of difficulty pulling things off for myself, but I did it alone and it worked out."

Notwithstanding his anxieties, Brian says the idea to sing the complex "Good Vibrations" alone at a piano was his own.

"I thought, 'What should I do that would be a signature that somebody could identify with?' At least so I wouldn't sit there like a dumbbell with my finger up my ass, going *'Duhhh. . . .'*"

photograph by Stan Love

Brian at 34: "I'm very neurotic."

Throughout Wilson's *Saturday Night* spots, Dr. Landy stood off-camera, holding up signs inscribed with instructions for his patient. Wilson now concedes they were not mere cue cards.

"They said, 'Smile' and some things like that. It was sorta like he was encouraging me to relax, and put out some smiles and all of that."

Dr. Landy feels it was "an excellent idea" to have Brian on the program and thinks his critics miscomprehended his motives in doing so.

"Four of these shows and he would have been doing them with no problem," Landy says. "That was the game plan. When a person works out of fear, they have to adjust to the environment, and each environment is new because it's fearful in the beginning. That was a fearful situation.

"As a one-shot it was a terrible thing, but *not* if we'd done the four or five we were planning on. By the fourth one you would see the flow that really is there when we sit down in his living room together and fuck around—or in the studio.

"We were ready to do a lot more. It was taken out of my control by emotional responses rather than knowledgeable decisions. That's the way most Beach Boys things are, though."

Despite its flaws, *The Beach Boys Love You* exudes a convincingly hopeful felicity that stands in sharp contrast to the hoarse, perturbed performance its creator gave on *Saturday Night*. Uninformed listeners will find it a charming, often invigorating record, while knowledgeable fans will recognize it as ingenuous music from Brian Wilson's heart. ■

I'M A POOPER, NOT A BUZZER

by Brian Wilson

THE BEACH BOYS LOVE YOU
The Beach Boys
Warner Bros. (MSK 2258)

I'm very determined to do something with my life. I figure, why waste your energy when you can be doing something for somebody? Everybody else is contributing to the cause, and I think, "Why couldn't I?" I wanted to contribute to the world, rather than just waste my life away.

The title of the new album was my idea. It's telling the fans or whoever receives the album that they're admired—the Beach Boys love you. I just thought it would be a good sound people could feel secure with. It's a security thing. Whenever you see something like *The Beach Boys Love You*, it just gives you that *secure* feeling.

I like the new album better than the last one. It's bigger although it's smaller—one less song. It's a cleaner album; the tracks and the songs seem to come off cleaner. Also, there's no real oldies—all originals.

I'll talk about some tracks:

"Johnny Carson"

One morning I was on my way to the studio and I'd been thinking about how I'd seen Johnny on TV the night before and I said to myself, "Goddamn it! There's gotta be some song about Johnny Carson!" I mean, he's been an idol of so many people for so many years and why not a song about Johnny Carson?! So I said, "Fer Chrissakes!" When I got to the studio I sat down and I goddamn cranked out a song about him. I'm definitely a fan.

"Let Us Go on this Way"

Well, Mike Love and I wrote that rocker. We decided we needed a rock 'n roll kinda thing because everything was deadbeat and we needed something uptempo. So we got into a strong rock 'n roll scene.

"Roller Skating Child"

This is a song I developed in my house, instead of at the studio, about five, no, four months ago. I started on a melody; I had a fragment there. Then I took it into the studio and refinished it, touched it up. So it was written in two

photograph courtesy of Mike Koehn

Brian at 17: "I wanted to contribute."

different places with two different moods. It started out as one mood, then it built into a chorus and I got a theme to it.

It was inspired by my two daughters, Carnie and Wendy. Carnie actually goes *ice*-skating but I called it "Roller skating child, with a ribbon in her hair." We all go out to a skating rink in Santa Monica.

"Ding Dang"

That came from Roger McGuinn and I. I know him casually—I'm not a real close friend of his—although I've been to his house. I went over his house one night, spent the night there—though I didn't stay *all* night. In the course of the evening, we began to play piano and started screwing around. He said, "Hey, I like that riff you're playing!" He dug what I was into and it just developed. All of a sudden it started to develop into "Ding, dang, ding and a ding-dong." He wrote the lyrics and I wrote the music. That was put together about a year ago.

"Love Is a Woman"

"Love Is a Woman" was first performed live on *Saturday Night*. It's just about everybody, about anything, about how things are. It's an idea that a woman *is* love. A baby is love, too, of course. It's just an experience, you know? "Love is a Baby" would have been a better title.

"Let's Put Our Hearts Together"

The song was a range problem for me. I could do the lead but when I wrote the song I recorded a track in a certain key. When I went to sing it, I noticed I was having difficulty with the range in one part. So I said, "Why not let my wife Marilyn relieve me on that range in one part? Let her do it." It worked out fine that way—that was the motive behind it. It was just a matter of making the range happen; Marilyn and I did a little togetherness thing.

"I Want to Pick You Up"

The song is descriptive of a man who considers this chick a baby, and he says, "Well, you still have a baby in you. You're still like a baby to me. You just sorta have that thing and I want to pick you up." Even though she's too big to pick up, of course. But he wants to; he wants to pretend she's small like a baby: He really wants to pick her up!

"Good Time"

We did it with Spring first [a duo consisting of Marilyn Wilson and sister Diane Rovell who released the cut as a 1972 single off their UA lp]. On the same tape was my lead vocal and Marilyn did her lead part too. They didn't ever erase my lead, so when the *Spring* album wasn't that successful I thought maybe the exposure of that song to people would be good. Why waste a song?

"Solar System"

It just happened. I was on the way to a school meeting for my daughter. We went down there and on the way, in the car, I started thinking about, "What do the planets mean?" I looked up in the sky and I saw the planets and I just thought, "Hey! What do the planets mean to you? And have you ever seen the sunrise in the morning, shining like when you were born?" It's just something that came to my mind. Later on, I developed it into the song; I didn't come up with the title that night but I wrote the words in the car.

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Overall, I've written 28 new songs. I'm starting to load up. With three new songs and what we have in the can, I think we'll have another album all put together. We're getting into it. I hope we pick the right single. We're a little distraught over the failure of our last two ["It's O.K." and "Susie Cincinnati"].

Touring last summer was hard work, definitely a strain on my system to do it and withstand all the pressures of the stadiums and the sound and all that. I thought it was a great test on me to be able to do that but I managed somehow . . . though I was uneasy.

I dunno, I guess I've changed in the way that I've become more adult. I think I've become a more adult *thinker* over the last year . . . and I've straightened up. The thing is, I'm just pooping along. Some people buzz along. I poop along. I can't help it; that's the way I am. I'm just a pooper. ■